



PROPHETIC TIMES

January 1998

The Weekly Reader of World News

August 31, 2024

Millions of Shiite Muslim pilgrims rally in Iraq

August 29, 2024 *spacewar.com* reported: “More than 21 million Shiite Muslims took part in the Arbaeen pilgrimage in Iraq this year, which reached its peak on Sunday with attendees displaying their support for Gaza.

Arbaeen, which means forty in Arabic, marks the 40th day of mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed and a founding figure in Shiite Islam.

It is one of the world’s biggest religious gatherings and a major event for Shiites, who are the majority in Iraq and Iran.

Karbala, where Hussein and his brother Abbas are buried in two enormous mausoleums facing each other, is the centre of the Shiite world during this time.

Pilgrims freely express their suffering, weeping and wailing in memory of Hussein, who was killed in 680 during a battle in Karbala with the Umayyad caliph Yazid.

This year, the events have included prominent displays of Palestinian flags by pilgrims, *AFP* photographers reported, amid the war in Gaza. ‘The total number of Arbaeen pilgrims... reached 21,480,525’, the institution that manages the Abbas mausoleum and is responsible for the count, said...”

Hezbollah still in shock, assessing damage from Israel’s pre-emptive strike – IDF Col.

August 28, 2024 *jpost.com* reported: “Colonel Anan Abbas, Head of Control at the Northern Command’s central operations room, revealed in an interview with *Maariv* on Tuesday that the recent operation against Hezbollah required months of meticulous preparation. ‘Hezbollah is trying to assess the extent of the damage they’ve sustained,’ he said...”

Earlier in the week, the IDF emphasized that while the operation was primarily tactical, it sent powerful signals to Hezbollah—messages that could potentially lead to broader strategic shifts.

‘It seems Hezbollah was genuinely surprised,’ noted Abbas. ‘Their shock comes from the sheer number of planes we deployed simultaneously, striking an overwhelming number of targets in a very short time. They’re also astonished by the precision of our strikes—how we managed to accurately hit so many targets, neutralize their assets, and do so without harming civilians or causing collateral damage.’

‘This operation took months of preparation,’ he said, highlighting the extensive intelligence-gathering, target identification, and strike planning that went into it. In addition to airstrikes, the IDF also employed artillery fire from several batteries, which targeted various locations in Lebanon...”

White House's Kirby says US would defend Israel in Iranian attack

August 27, 2024 *jpost.com* reported: The United States remains committed to defending Israel in the event of an Iranian attack, White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday. Kirby told Israel's Channel 12 that it was tough to predict the chances of an attack but the White House takes Iranian rhetoric seriously. "We believe that they are still postured and poised to launch an attack should they want to do that, which is why we have that enhanced force posture in the region," he said.

"Our messaging to Iran is consistent, has been and will stay consistent. One, don't do it. There's no reason to escalate this. There's no reason to potentially start some sort of all out regional war. And number two, we are going to be prepared to defend Israel if it comes to that ...”



Japan scrambles jets after China aircraft ‘violates’ airspace: ministry

August 26, 2024 spacewar.com reported: “Japan scrambled fighter jets after a Chinese military aircraft ‘violated’ Japanese airspace, the defence ministry said Monday. A Chinese aircraft was ‘confirmed to have violated the territorial airspace off the Danjo Islands in Nagasaki Prefecture,’ the ministry said in a statement, adding it had launched ‘fighter jets on an emergency basis.’”

The ‘Y-9 intelligence-gathering’ aircraft entered Japanese airspace at 11:29 am (0229 GMT) for around two minutes, the ministry added. Local media including public broadcaster NHK said the incident marked the first incursion by the Chinese military’s aircraft into Japan’s airspace.

Japanese and Chinese vessels have previously been involved in tense incidents in disputed areas, in particular the Senkaku islands in the East China Sea, known by Beijing as the Diaoyus. The remote chain of islands has fueled diplomatic tensions and been the scene of confrontations between Japanese coastguard vessels and Chinese fishing boats...”

The Man Who Would Make Germany Far Right Again

August 26, 2024 wsj.com reported: “Since the end of World War II, the birthplace of Nazism has kept far-right forces out of power. A former high-school teacher who has never held political office is hoping to change that.

Björn Höcke, the firebrand head of the AfD party in the eastern German state of Thuringia, is leading ahead of a Sept. 1 regional ballot, according to an Aug. 13 survey by the INSA polling group. This puts a man who once said it was problematic to represent Hitler as “absolutely evil” in pole position to be the first postwar far-right politician to win a German state election.



Björn Höcke

Even if he doesn’t end up governing, a ballot win would make history in Germany. Crowning one of Europe’s most hard-line far-right groups would also mark an inflection point for a region where right-wing parties have found success by sanding down their ideological edges.

“It would be a turning point for sure, an earthquake,” said Axel Salheiser, scientific director of the Institute for Democracy and Civil Society in Jena, Thuringia’s second-largest city. “It would be highly symbolic for a far-right party to win, here of all places, in former East Germany, where the experience of dictatorship stretches across the 20th century.”

Thuringia is one of three eastern German states holding elections in September, out of a total of 16 states in the country. Most polls have shown the AfD leading in all three throughout the summer, with Höcke holding the biggest lead—nine points ahead of the conservative Christian Democratic Union, according to INSA...In rallies around Thuringia billed as “family parties,” Höcke has projected a smiling, positive mood. Physically, the trim, gray-haired but youthful-looking 52-year-old father of four cuts an unthreatening, even friendly figure.

After a rally this month on the picturesque market square of Apolda, a midsize town in northern Thuringia, a smiling Höcke, wearing jeans and an open shirt despite the rain, signed photographs, shook hands and shared hugs with supporters, one of whom had brought handmade cookies.

His speech earlier had a harder edge. After calling German reunification an experiment “to transform a monocultural society into a multicultural society,” he said: “I’m asking myself, were we ever asked if we wanted to become multicultural? No, we weren’t, and that is why that multicultural experiment will end in Thuringia on Sept. 1.”

In a 2017 speech about Berlin’s sprawling Holocaust memorial, he said, “We Germans are the only people in the world who’ve planted a monument of shame at the heart of their capital.” That year, he told *The Wall Street Journal* that “the big problem is that one presents Hitler as absolutely evil...”

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